DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 302 SP 037 429

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TITLE Self-Examination of One's Own Ethnicity in the Context of Teacher Preparation for a Pluralistic Society.
PUB DATE 25 Mar 97
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; *Culturally Relevant Education; Early Childhood Education; Educational Change; Elementary Education; *Ethnicity; Higher Education; *Multicultural Education; Perspective Taking; Preservice Teacher Education; *Reflective Teaching; *Self Concept; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); Teacher Education Curriculum; Teacher Education Programs
IDENTIFIERS Cultural Sensitivity; Developmentally Appropriate Programs

ABSTRACT

This study explored how prospective teachers develop multiple or multiethnic perspective-taking abilities through autobiographical self-examination of their own ethnicity and how such self-examination helps them utilize developmentally and culturally appropriate teaching practices. The participants were prospective teachers enrolled in early childhood/elementary education course at Pennsylvania State University (University Park Campus) or Clarion University of Pennsylvania. Participants completed an autobiographical self-examination based on a formatted list of questions designed to elicit reflective writing. Participants also participated in small group and general group discussion. The major data analysis consisted of ongoing readings of collected data with open, axial, and selective coding, scanning for significant units, reflective note-taking, and cross-case analysis. Autobiographical self-assessment was found to help prospective teachers to develop a conceptual sense of perspective-taking ability. The activity also helped the prospective teachers to critically look at teachers' pedagogical behavior with children from diverse backgrounds, and it allowed them to see individual uniqueness based on family culture that is beyond ethnic or group orientation. (Contains 24 references.) (JLS)

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ED 409 302

Self-Examination of One's Own Ethnicity In the Context of Teacher Preparation for a Pluralistic Society

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Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Conference, Chicago, IL, March 25, 1997

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Self-Examination of One's Own Ethnicity In the Context of Teacher Preparation for a Pluralistic Society

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how prospective teachers develop multiple/multiethnic perspective-taking abilities through autobiographical self-examination of their own ethnicity and others.

Research Question

The major research questions were: (1) What does an autobiographical self-examination of their own ethnicity mean to prospective teachers? (2) How do they relate their self-realization of their own culture to others? (3) In what ways does the autobiographical self-examination lead them to construct a multiple/multiethnic perspective-taking ability? (4) In what ways does the autobiographical self-examination allow them to realize the importance of developmentally and culturally appropriate practice (DCAP) as culturally congruent critical pedagogy in education? (5) In what ways does the autobiographical self-examination allow them to understand, account for, and plan to incorporate DCAP into their teaching lives?

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework for this study was social phenomenology. Social phenomenology enables qualitative researchers to explore human consciousness via the ways that the life world--experiential world every person takes for granted--is produced and experienced by members (Schultz, 1970, 1967; Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). Social phenomenologists see that individuals construct and reconstruct their unique understanding of reality, which is considered intersubjectivity. This intersubjectivity becomes objectified as the experiential world that every person takes for granted. Multiple ways of interpreting objectified intersubjectivities are available to constitute reality (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992). This theoretical framework enabled me to explore the ways that the prospective teachers in this

study formed their cultural identity and consciousness of it in relation to the needs of DCAP in education. This theoretical framework also allowed for the research participants to share how they came to understand and account for their discovery of own culture.

Conceptual Framework-Brief Review of Research Background

Most multicultural educators and researchers agree that to function cross-culturally and to ensure an education that values diversity and multiple/multiethnic perspectives, prospective teachers must be helped to reflect on and examine their own cultural identity and values (Banks, 1994a, 1994b; Baker, 1994; Kincheloe, 1993; Nieto, 1992; Sleeter& Grant, 1994). Without awareness and acceptance of our own cultural values, we risk "cultural myopia," a failure to perceive the cultural differences between ourselves and those in other groups (Kumabe, Nishida, & Hepworth, 1985; Hyun & Marshall, 1996; McAdoo, 1993). Autobiographical self-examination of their own culture and values will help prospective teachers develop cross-cultural sensitivity necessary to make education that is multicultural (Stewart & Bennett 1991). According to the Teacher Preparation Model for Developmentally and Culturally Appropriate Practice (Hyun, in press, Hyun & Marshall, 1996; Hyun, Marshall, & Dana, 1995), prospective teachers should be helped to know, to care, and to act in ways that will foster learning and development in democratic classrooms. Through an autobiographical approach knowing more about oneself and others would occur naturally. It would lead prospective teachers to develop multiple/multiethnic perspective-taking ability which is a fundamental key to DCAP.

Participants and Data Collection

The participants of this study consisted of prospective teachers who were enrolled in four different levels of early childhood/elementary education courses, during Fall 1993 through Spring 1996, at either the Pennsylvania State University, University Park Campus, or Clarion University of Pennsylvania. In the first class of each course, I introduced and gave an

"Autobiographical Self-Examination for Diversity" format. The format is from Teacher Preparation Model for Developmentally and Culturally Appropriate Practice and has 25 self-inquiry oriented questions regarding cultures of self and family. The prospective teachers in the courses had a week to do a personal reflective writing based on the questions from the format. They were encouraged to think and respond to as many questions as possible, but responding to all the questions was not required. In the second week of each course, the participants engaged in a 40-minute small group discussion and then a 40-minute general group discussion to share their experience of autobiographical self-examination of their own ethnicity and family culture. As participant observer, during the last part of the discussion, I posed some inquiries such as follows: "How well do I know my own culture?" "In what ways did/does my culture(s) help me to become a teacher who can provide an equal and congruent learning experience for all children?" "How well do I understand education that is truly multicultural to promote a culturally congruent and equal learning environment for all the children I will teach?" After the discussion, all the participants were required to reflect on the discussion and express their thoughts in their academic journal. At the end of each semester, in their last class, the prospective teachers were asked to produced a self reflective evaluation statement and to present it. These last activities gave them a synthesizing learning experience related to the autobiographical self-examination of own ethnicity at the beginning of each semester to the end of all the learning experience that had taken place within each course. Their personal documents, academic journal, and my participant note taking were the main data collection. In the data collection I looked for reflections on the participants' personal meaning of autobiographical self-examination of their own culture and others as a means for developing sensitivity for diversity.

Techniques for Analysis

Phenomenologists assume that the researcher is essentially the main "measurement device" in the study, and through continued readings of the source material and through

vigilance over one's presuppositions, one can reach what is constant in a person's life across its many variations. This approach leads to a "practical understanding" of objectified meanings and actions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The major data analysis consisted of ongoing readings of collected data. Open, axial, and selective coding, scanning for selecting significant units, categorizing, memoing, reflective note taking, and cross-case analysis were used as important parts of this qualitative research process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Especially during the open coding period I followed six steps of open coding procedures (Hyun, 1995). Through these data analysis techniques, data were triangulated to provide a richer understanding of the participants' construction of multiple/multiethnic perspective-taking ability through autobiographical self-examination of one's own culture and related discussion for their DCAP.

Result/Conclusion

Several themes emerged from the participants' reflection on their autobiographical self-examination activity. First, this autobiographical self-assessment has helped these prospective teachers develop a conceptual sense of perspective-taking ability other than oneself:

> *The self-awareness activity did help me to reflect on my own background and how I think of others. The activity actually made me think about what I think of my own culture, which is something I never really thought about before. But in doing so, I realize that it is important to me for other people to understand my culture, and in turn that others would probably feel the same way.* (Sharon's Journal Entry 3, January 1995)

Second, the autobiographical activity also helped the prospective teachers to critically looking at teachers' pedagogical behavior with children from diverse backgrounds:

> *I think it is especially important for Caucasian teachers to be sensitive and open toward other cultures and to feel comfortable with the cultures of different children. I also think it is important for Caucasian teachers not to impose "their" cultures on children of other cultures, which is sometimes done without even realizing it. Sometimes Caucasian teachers who are in the "mainstream culture" (so they may think), think that since these children live surrounded by the (mainstream) cultures, it is acceptable to gear the children toward it. I personally think that this should be avoided at all costs, and I think I will be successful at avoiding this because I am aware of it through this activity.* **(Sharon's Journal Entry 3, January 1995)**

It also allowed them to see individual uniqueness based on family culture that is beyond the ethnic or group/race orientation and led them to make a connection to the issue of equal education:

> *I think it is important for future teachers to realize that not every child comes from the same type of background. In fact, no two children will never be the same. Teachers need to be aware of this and adjust their teaching style and strategies accordingly. This way, hopefully, all children can benefit and have an equal chance in education. Too many times in the past, teachers have ingnored the fact that family background plays an extremely large part in how a child learns. I think that teachers need to learn as much as they can about each child as an individual. The teacher needs to recognize that differences are good and if everyone was the same life would be very boring. (Erin, Journal Entry 1, January, 1996)*

Throughout each semester, the autobiographical approach led them to realize the need for creating diverse interaction and teaching styles in conjunction with their development of second, third, multiple/multiethnic perspective-taking abilities:

> *...The student population is very diverse (racially, linguistically and ethnically) and this diversity is reflected in the books, the food, the language, the holidays and the activities that are taught... During calender and song time, children ask to sing and count in*

several (I think it's 7) different languages; children that aren't native English speakers are talked to, as much as possible, in their native tongue...The 4 teachers at Home for Children take concrete steps towards learning about different cultures, especially trying to learn about the different cultures in the classroom. There are children from Korea, Holland, Saudi Arabia, England. Most of these children have an extremely hard time each morning when their mom/dad leaves..The problem is that it is rather hard to console a child without being able to verbally communicate with him/her. One of the ways that they are dealing with this problem is that the teachers are trying to learn key phrases in the child's native language. There are sheets posted all over the center with appropriate phrases like "Mommy will be back soon," or "Do you have to go to the bathroom?" written in both languages. (Ana's Journal Entry 5, p.2, February 1995)

...I ask the kids, Is there another way you want to count? What language? They have Spanish, haiti, Arabic, Korean, Siamese, Japanese, and French... (Ana's Mid-term interview during preservice students teachihng, March, 1995)

Lastly, the realization that resulted from the prospective teachers' autobiographical activity suggests that teacher preparation programs should provide students with learning experiences regarding multiethnic family cultural characteristics which affect diverse children's learning and development:

The biggest obstacles...if I had four children, two of which were American and two were English as a second language [38 out of 45 students in the school use English as a second language]...I want to learn more for myself how to prepare lessons just for the English as a Second Language [students] because some of them would just sit down and just like would look around. It just touches my heart because I want them to all be focusing on the lessons but it's hard to because if the child doesn't understand... ...sometimes it's so hard because I don't know a lot of their backgrounds... I know where they're coming from like some are from India, Japan, Korea. But I don't know their family backgrounds...how they're taught at home...I want to have a good interaction with the parents... I want to see what they are doing at home...I asked the parents what are you doing at home with the children? What are they reading at home with the children...What do they like? What do they dislike? I asked [them] to tell me the different words in your [their] language that I could communicate with the children because I don't know what to say to a child if they are doing something wrong in the class or in my lesson...If they don't understand English I'd like to at least know certain words. (Mindy's final interview during preservice student teaching experience, May 1995)

> *. . . the teacher should understand that a family's culture influences all aspects of the members' lives and must be understood not just in terms of overt behaviors, traditions, and artifacts but as a system of beliefs and values that underlie a world view. (Irene's Journal Entry 3, January 1995)*
>
> *We should just try to develop a general knowledge of a few cultures and then over time keep expanding that knowledge base. I felt that this was a very good point that Kevin brought up because there are so many cultures that we could never learn everything about all of them . . . We all hope that we will be aware of these cultural cues that children send us because sometimes we may not have a lot of knowledge about their culture, and our communication may be limited due to language barriers. (Karen's Journal Entry 3, January 1995)*

Knowledge of family ethnicity would be helpful for the prospective teachers' pedagogical development. An ability to step back from the world as we are accustomed to perceiving it and to see how our perceptions are constructed through linguistic codes, cultural practices, and socially embedded power was critically reflected in the prospective teachers' autobiographical activity. This ability eventuates in not only the person's self-realization of identity which is called ethnic first-person perspective-taking ability but also in their second and third-person/multiple/multiethnic perspective-taking abilities which help individual prospective teachers' cultural and educational critiques to anchor their own DCAP.

Educational Implications of the Study

Since 1979, U.S. teacher education programs have begun the major undertaking of preparing teachers for "education that is multicultural education" which has become a significant task in teacher preparation (The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher

Education, 1979, 1992). However, the issue of preparing teachers to develop the capability and sensitivity to respond well to multiple/multiethnic perspectives of diverse learners has been an issue of considerable controversy. Most teacher education programs exhibit limited procedures and practices to prepare teachers to be culturally sensitive (Baker, 1994; Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Fuller, 1992; Heberman, 1991; Hinchey, 1994; Marshall, 1994). "How" and "what" to prepare these teachers for are critical issues facing teacher education.

Teacher preparation for "education that is multicultural" is not simply preparing teachers who are sensitive to race, gender, ethnicity, religion, diverse socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, etc. This preparation should help prospective teachers develop an understanding of their self and their own family ethnic culture to help them realize how individual' formation makes them different from others. This approach to teacher preparation could also help them to recognize the multiple/multiethnic perspectives in diverse learners' sense making of learning. Teacher preparation is not a matter of searching for "one best" way of learning and teaching. It is a matter of learning, valuating, and willing to integrate diverse learners' "many best ways" of making sense of their learning within a multiple and multiethnic learning environment.

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